

1. **Introduction:** Chapter 12 provides a theological center for Revelation; a summary of why the church suffers persecution in this world and how God will bring victory over all evil.
2. **The Woman, Her Son, and the Dragon (12:1-6):** The leading characters of the drama are introduced: (1.) the pregnant woman, and (2.) her powerful adversary, the dragon.
 - Later, in chapters 17 and 18, another woman is introduced. The two women are opposites. The first woman in chapter 12 represents the faithful people of God in Israel who eagerly anticipate the birth of Christ and recognized the Son of Mary as being the awaited Messiah.
 - In a vision, John sees the drama's action as though it is unfolding in real time. In 12:1, a great sign (meaning a symbol with deep significance) appears in heaven. It is a pregnant woman. The pregnant woman is adorned with 3 distinct celestial elements: she is clothed with the sun, has the moon under her feet, and wears a crown of twelve stars on her head.
 - The sun symbolizes God's glory and righteousness. Standing on the moon symbolizes the old covenant. The crown of 12 stars symbolizes the 12 tribes of Israel, leadership and victory.
 - In sharp contrast, the prostitute in chapters 17 and 18 represents Babylon the Great, symbolizing corrupt worldly empires, seduction, and religious-economic systems that oppose God.
 - The great prostitute is adorned in rich royal clothing, including purple and scarlet fabrics, decorated with gold, precious jewels, and pearls. She holds a golden cup full of vile impurities and has a mysterious name written on her forehead.
3. **Revelation 12:1-6:** *And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, ⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.*
4. **The Woman:** The pregnant woman who cries out from the pains of childbirth (12:2) is a composite figure symbolizing Mary the mother of Jesus and true Israel (i.e., true to Jesus as the expected Messiah). Kiddle says the pregnant woman represents "*the true Israel in her pre-messianic agony of expectation.*"
 - The word translated "in pain" is *basanizo*. It is a Greek word used in the NT signifying suffering, punishment, trial, and persecution (Mt 8:6, 29; 14:24; Mk 5:7; 6:48; 2Peter 2:8). It is used in Revelation to describe torment inflicted by demons (9:5) or by God (11:10; 14:10; 20:10).
 - In this instance *basanizo* most likely means birth pangs of Christ's new church caused by persecution. Beale says that nowhere in biblical or extra-biblical literature is *basanizo* used in reference to a woman suffering birth pains. The pain here is the suffering of faithful people of God.

- All the redeemed are “in Jesus,” the son of Mary. Thus, she is the spiritual mother (?) of all the redeemed. Rev 12:17 references *“the rest of her offspring.”* After the birth of the child, Satan switched his attention to making war on those who became spiritual descendants of Mary. They were descendants joined to Jesus through their acceptance of Him as the expected Messiah who would save His people.
 - The community of faithful who anticipated Jesus as Messiah was largely confined to Israel. After Pentecost, that was no longer true. Belief in Jesus as Messiah grew steadily, mostly among Gentiles. The pregnant woman, thus, represents the spiritual mother of all believers including the first believers from the faithful remnant within Israel who believed Jesus to be Messiah together with believing Gentiles.
5. **The Dragon:** In 12:3-4, a second dramatic sign appears in the form of an enormous red dragon (12:3) with 7 heads and 10 horns representing Satan, the ultimate in evil power.
- The OT portrays serpents and sea monsters as evil forces set against God and His people. That is a fitting image for God’s archenemy who attempts to lead the whole world astray.
 - The archenemy’s identity is made explicit in Rev 12:9. He is *“that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.”*
 - Satan’s fiery red color symbolizes violence, war, and bloodshed. The 7 heads and 10 horns represent the widespread nature of the dragon’s evil influence (reminiscent of the 10-horned fourth beast of Dan 7:7-8, 20, 24). There are 7 diadems on the beast’s 7 heads. The word “diadem” (diadema) means a royal or ruling crown. Satan wears seven of them to mimic true divine royalty.
 - The picture in 12:4 of the dragon’s tail sweeping down a third of the stars of heaven and casting them to the earth is likely from Daniel 8:10.
 - The community of faithful who believe Jesus to be the promised Messiah grew. After Pentecost, belief in Jesus as Messiah grew steadily especially among Gentiles.
 - The “stars of heaven” referred to in 12:4 are not likely to be the angels who fell with Satan. The major reason for thinking this is that the time in 12:4 is shortly before the birth of Jesus. The Fall of the angels with Lucifer seems to have occurred before earth’s creation or certainly before the events of Genesis 6.
 - Beale makes another powerful point about the timing of the fall of the “stars of heaven.”
 - Beale says, *“The observation that the ‘tails’ of Satan’s demons afflict people on earth in Rev. 9:10 and 9:19 also points to the idea that the tail of the dragon here is afflicting people and not merely or primarily angels. This is confirmed further by the close relation of 12:4 to 12:1. The portrayal of the stars in v. 4 must have a close relationship with the ‘twelve stars; only three verses earlier. The falling stars must symbolize an attack on Israel, since the twelve stars in v. 1 represent the heavenly identification of the true Israel Though ultimately protected ... genuine Israel, nevertheless, will still suffer satanic attack (Beale 667).”*
 - The second half of 12:4 is focused on Satan’s determination to kill Jesus upon His birth.
 - The great red dragon would not accept the child’s birth without fighting. The dragon made every attempt to devour the child during birth.
 - But a male child was successfully born and as told by the angel, Gabriel, Mary called Him Jesus.

- Jesus is sovereign over all the nations. He will redeem those who believe in Him, saving them from the punishment due their sins. Because He is Mary's Son, those He redeems are spiritual descendants of Mary.
 - After the child was born, Satan, with his army of fallen angels in tow, turned his wrath on the woman and her Messiah child. As seen in the NT, Satan attempted many times to kill the infant Jesus. When that failed, he attempted to divert Jesus from His mission of salvation.
 - The community of faithful who believe Jesus to be the promised Messiah grew,. No longer confined to Israel, it grew steadily, mostly among Gentiles.
 - The pregnant woman was then seen to represent the spiritual mother of all believers including the first believers from the faithful remnant within Israel who believed Jesus to be Messiah and believing Gentiles.
 - Those being redeemed are "Born Again." When born the first time, they were born spiritually dead because of Adam and Eve's sin. Spiritually Born-Again, they become members of God's family.
 - As followers of Christ, they form the church under Jesus' dominion. Ultimately the supremacy of Christ will be recognized and accepted by all people and the final defeat of the dragon will be complete.
 - In 12:5-6, it is pointed out that the woman and her male child will both be protected by God. In the language of Ps 2, the male child is described as One who will rule all the nations.
 - The protection of the woman's male child (Jesus) clearly did not include physical protection from crucifixion. Nor does the church (which is "in Jesus" receive physical protection). But Jesus in His human nature and all people "in Christ" have perfect spiritual protection and protection of their mission as given by God.
 - After His crucifixion, Jesus, the first woman's child, was snatched up to God and His throne, an obvious reference to Jesus' ascension. The woman fled into a wilderness place prepared by God. There she is "taken care of" for 1,260 days.
 - The woman who flees into the wilderness does not appear to refer to Mary. There is no indication in the record that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was persecuted after Jesus' death and resurrection.
 - However, the nascent church was most definitely persecuted after Jesus' crucifixion and needed protection. One of the great persecutors was the man who would become the Apostle Paul.
 - This reference to fleeing to the wilderness appears to refer to the scattering of believers as they were driven out of the Jerusalem area by persecution from the attempts of the Jewish hierarchy to squelch the new Christian movement.
 - Being scattered turned out to be a very good thing for Christian growth. They carried the good news of Jesus wherever they went.
 - The reference to fleeing to a wilderness also reminds us that wildernesses in the experience of God's people are not only a place of trial, but also a place of refuge, protection, and provision.
6. **Next:** War in heaven (12:7-12).